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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000933

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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SUBJECT: MALDIVES: GAYOOM IS TOP VOTE-GETTER, BUT FACES OCTOBER 29 RUNOFF

REF: A) COLOMBO 928 B) COLOMBO 917

Classified By: DCM JAMES R. MOORE, FOR REASONS 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Final results of the first round of Maldives' first-ever multiparty presidential election (ref a) showed that incumbent President Gayoom took just over 40% of the vote, with five challengers splitting the rest. There were technical flaws in the election, including problems with voters missing from the registration lists, which caused significant delays in voting and counting in many areas. However, there were few signs of manipulation or intimidation, and international observers concluded that Maldivians had the opportunity to express their will. Gayoom now faces a runoff on October 29 against his nearest rival, Mohamed Nasheed ("Anni") of the Maldives Democratic Party (MDP), who got around 25% of the vote. The third-place finisher, former Attorney General Hassan Saeed (16%), announced unconditional support for Anni. Anni claimed to have the backing of the united opposition parties to defeat Gayoom. However, Qasim Ibrahim, with 15% of the vote, has yet to confirm his support for Anni and will likely end up as the kingmaker. The second round may prove to be a tight race between Gayoom and one of his most consistent and vocal critics, Anni. Some observers are concerned that the incumbent could resort to unfair tactics in an attempt to skew the vote in his favor. End summary.

¶2. (U) Final results confirmed by Maldives' Election Commission in the first round of voting for President were as follows (in order of listing on ballot):

Qasim Ibrahim	Republican	27,056	15.32%
Maumoon Gayoom	DRP	71,731	40.63%
Hassan Saeed	independent	29,633	16.78%
Mohamed Nasheed	MDP	44,293	25.09%
Ibrahim Ismail	SLP	1,382	.78%
Umar Naseer	IDP	2,472	1.40%

¶3. (SBU) Local monitors (Transparency Maldives, the Maldives Human Rights Commission, journalists) and international observers (British Commonwealth and the EU-led group of Colombo-based diplomats, including three U.S. Embassy personnel) noted technical problems with the election, especially in the voter lists. These contained numerous errors and omissions. In many areas, individuals, entire households, and in at least one case, a block of houses were

simply missing from the rolls. The Elections Commission itself noted the deficiencies in lists the day before the election and expressed concern. Lists were generally posted not in the national language, Dhivehi, but only in Roman alphabet -- which the majority of Maldivians, especially those in remote areas, can not read. This led to confusion and delays at most polling places, where as many as 5 - 10% of voters were turned away because they did not appear on the electoral rolls. Frustrated election officials had inadequate instructions on how to deal with complaints and lacked authority to take independent action.

¶4. (SBU) Worse, the telephone lines to the Elections Commission were jammed all day, making it impossible for election officials or ordinary voters to contact the Commission for guidance. Around mid-day, tensions subsided as the Elections Commission announced that anyone could register on the spot with a valid national ID card, which allowed many of those turned away in the morning to return to polling places and cast their votes. Political party observers from across the spectrum expressed concern that this could lead to multiple voting. Observers saw little evidence that this occurred, however.

¶5. (SBU) Throughout the process, apart from a few outbursts by angry would-be voters, Maldivians generally remained patient, calm and focused. Voters and polling officials showed great tolerance and forbearance. Voting, despite the delays, proceeded in an orderly, disciplined manner. One election worker, a local schoolteacher, told PolOff that Maldivians had been working toward this day for at least five

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years, and would not be deflected from their goal to express their collective political will.

¶6. (SBU) As soon as the results were known, on the afternoon of October 9, third-place finisher Hassan Saeed announced his unconditional support for Anni and the MDP's effort to change the government. The last-place finisher, "Ibra," also backed Anni and hinted his own political career was probably over. The MDP held an open meeting in Male late on October 9 and invited all opposition parties to re-forge their earlier alliance to defeat Gayoom. Anni subsequently announced that he had the support of all his defeated rivals. However, fourth-place finisher Qasim and the Islamic Democratic Party's Umar Naseer have yet to endorse Anni or confirm their support.

¶7. (SBU) The Elections Commission announced on October 10 that the runoff election between Gayoom and Anni would take place on October 29 - the later of the two possible dates according to varying interpretations of the new constitution and election statute. This has the advantage of giving the Commission more time to correct the flaws that troubled the first round, including cleaning up the voter registration lists and clarifying ambiguous instructions as to what form of identification is acceptable in order to cast a vote.

¶8. (SBU) Embassy Colombo issued the following statement on October 10:

(begin text)

United States congratulate Maldives on first round of elections

The United States congratulates the people of Maldives on its successful first round of elections - the first free, multi-party election in Maldivian history. We especially applaud those who worked to ensure that the vote was free and fair. U.S. and other international observers noted some problems, especially with the voter registration lists. The U.S. urges the Elections Commission to take corrective action. However, the U.S. believes the few voting irregularities could not have affected the final outcome.

This election, along with the recently ratified constitution, have helped to strengthen democracy in the Maldives and to ensure a stable and vibrant future for the islands. (end text)

¶9. (C) The result has left the role of kingmaker to Qasim, who may simply want to hold his options open for the time being. Some opposition politicians believe that Qasim was acting as a stalking horse for Gayoom since he resigned from the government to enter the race. The head of the EU election observer mission (protect) expressed doubt about Qasim's motives, noting that Qasim started his working life as a domestic servant for Gayoom's wife's family and has benefited throughout his business career through his ties to Gayoom.

¶10. (C) The same observer, a veteran of more than 40 election observation missions, told PolOff in Male on October 9 that he was more concerned about the conduct of the second round than the first. He was worried that the incumbent, if the second round appeared close, might resort to manipulation or intimidation to secure a narrow victory.

¶11. (C) COMMENT: Saeed may be able to deliver the bulk of his constituents to Anni. On the other hand, especially if Qasim endorses Gayoom, some older Qasim voters might opt for the more experienced and "presidential" incumbent. Some of Qasim's younger supporters told us, however, they will not vote for Gayoom under any circumstances, and will defect to Anni. It is also not clear whether members of the Islamist Adhaalath (Justice) Party, which backed Qasim, are prepared to switch to Gayoom in the runoff. Adhaalath filed a suit in Supreme Court to keep the incumbent off the ballot on the grounds that he was not a Sunni Muslim. The Supreme Court threw out the case, allowing Gayoom to run (ref b). In our

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view, given the high motivation of the Maldivian electorate, it would not be possible to conceal tampering on a scale that could change the outcome in the second round. This would likely lead to widespread public protests and could even usher in a period of instability in Maldives. Embassy plans to deploy officers again for the runoff to monitor the conduct of the election. Our presence, along with that of others, could help to deter any attempt to skew the result.
BLAKE